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STATE CENTRAL COMMITTEES.

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STATE CENTRAL COMMITTEES.

A STUDY OF PARTY ORGANIZATION.

THE purpose of this sketch is to present a brief outline of the organization of the central or executive committees of the Republican and Democratic parties in the several states. The statements made are based in part on the written or printed rules of the several state organizations. Twenty-two of these organizations, twelve Republican and ten Democratic, publish manuals showing the structure of the party government in the state, and regulating in a more or less detailed way the powers and duties of the officers and sub-committees.¹ Where no such manuals are obtainable, the important facts have been supplied by the chairmen of the state committees on blank forms submitted to them for that purpose.² The principal points considered in this discussion are the basis of apportionment of membership on the state committee, the method of election, the term of office, vacancies and removals, officers and sub-committees, and the general powers of the central committee.✕

✕ *Apportionment of membership.* — On examining the method of apportionment of membership on the committees, it appears that several different systems are in vogue. The various units on which representation is based are the congressional district, the county, the legislative district, representative or senatorial, the judicial district, and the town. There is also a mixed or composite basis. The prevailing practice is to use either the congressional district or the county as the unit of representation.✕ Of the Republican organizations fifteen use the congressional district, and of the Democratic twelve, making a total of twenty-

✕ ¹ Republican: Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Missouri, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia. Democratic: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia.

² The Democratic organizations in Nebraska and Texas are omitted from this discussion, as no report has been obtained. ✕

seven. The county is the unit in sixteen Republican committees and in twenty of the Democratic, making in all thirty-six. Of the ninety organizations, then, sixty-three employ either the congressional district or the county as the unit of representation. The legislative district is the basis in fourteen committees, nine Republican and five Democratic. The judicial district is used in two cases and the town in a like number. In some cases a mixed system is found, combining several methods. Of these the most remarkable is that of the Idaho Democratic committee, in which one member is taken from each of the five judicial districts, two are taken from each of the twenty-one counties, seven are chosen at large, and three so-called "press members" are selected in addition. In the Arkansas Democratic committee there is one member for each judicial district, one for each assembly district, and twenty are chosen at large. The California Democratic committee is composed of two members from each congressional district, one from each assembly district, and twenty at large. In the Republican committee of the same state, one member is allotted to each assembly district, and twenty-one are appointed at large by the chairman of the state convention. In many of the organizations already considered and classified, a number of members are appointed at large. In the Louisiana Democratic committee, thirty-five are thus appointed; in the California Republican committee, twenty-one; in the Louisiana Republican committee, twenty; in the Arkansas Republican committee, fifteen.

Which of these various methods shall be employed is determined by geographical rather than party considerations. The county system is employed almost exclusively in the far West, and to a considerable extent in the Northeast and in the South. The congressional district is employed in all of the Central states, except in the Democratic committee of Minnesota; to a considerable extent in the South; but nowhere in the East, except in the Republican committee in New York. The legislative district system has no particular habitat, except that it is not found in the Central states. Otherwise it may be encountered in any section of the country, as for example in Massachusetts, in Pennsylvania, in West Virginia, in Texas, and in California.

The apportionment of members to these various units is based

on geographical or territorial rather than numerical considerations. It is, in the main, not the party strength that is represented, but a given area or district. In some instances, however, recognition is given to the vote polled, although the principle is seldom fully carried out. In Nevada both organizations accord representation to each county in proportion to the party strength developed there. In the Democratic committees of Pennsylvania and Colorado each county is given one representative, and one additional member for every 10,000 votes cast for the Democratic candidate for President at the preceding election. In the Maryland Republican organization membership on the committee is given to Baltimore and the various counties in proportion to the number of representatives that each has in the legislature. In other cases, large and populous counties or cities are allowed additional although not proportional representation. Thus in the Delaware Republican committee each county has three members, except Wilmington, which has four. In the New Jersey Republican committee each county has one representative, but Essex and Hudson are given two each. In the Minnesota Democratic committee the three largest counties have two representatives instead of one. On the other hand, there are states in which the rights of the local area are very carefully guarded. In the Pennsylvania Republican committee, for example, each senatorial district is given two representatives, and if there are two counties in the district each must have one member. In the North Dakota Democratic committee each legislative district is allowed one representative, but, as in Pennsylvania, if there is more than one county in the district each of them is entitled to a member. In general, the system of representation follows that of the state legislatures in the strong emphasis placed on the local units. The logical basis of representation on the state committee is the party strength in the given unit; but the feeling that the localities must be recognized is in most cases stronger than the demands of abstract logic, and the weakest district obtains equal representation with the strongest.

The size of the committee varies greatly in the different states. The largest is the Maryland Republican committee, which contains 124 members. The Colorado Republican committee has

114 members; the Louisiana Democratic, 111; the California Republican, 101; the New Hampshire Republican, 108. In the large Maryland committee membership is distributed among the localities in the same proportion as in the state legislature of that commonwealth. The Colorado committee is made up of two members for each of the fifty-seven counties of the state; that of Louisiana is based on a membership of two for each of the parishes and thirty-five at large; that of California is formed by allowing one member to each assembly district and adding to this the twenty-one members at large chosen by the state convention. Some of the committees, on the other hand, are comparatively small. Thus the Democratic and Republican committees of Virginia and of Iowa are each composed of only eleven members; and in many other states the committees are little larger.

Term of service. — The term of membership on the state committees varies from one to four years, but the most common period is two years. The one-year term prevails in both parties in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Ohio, and also in the Pennsylvania Democratic organization. In West Virginia, Mississippi, Louisiana (both organizations) and in some other states, the term is four years. In New Jersey the term is three years in both parties, following the term of the governor of the state.

Method of election. — The election of members to the committee follows a general but not unvarying rule. In most cases the delegates to the state convention from the area to be represented, whether this be the congressional district, the county or some other area, choose their quota of members. For this purpose they caucus separately. The choice of the caucus is usually final, but in some cases the state convention has the right to reject the members selected. In some states, however, the members of the central committee are not selected in the state convention, but by the local authorities in the counties. Thus in the Republican organizations of New Jersey and Utah, and in the Democratic organizations of Pennsylvania and Washington, the members of the state committee are selected by the several county committees. In Utah the chairmen of the county committees are *ex officio* members of the state committee. In other cases each county convention chooses its state committeeman; so in the Republican organ-

izations in Maryland and Utah and in the South Dakota Democratic organization. Still another method of selection is that employed in Florida, where, under the new primary law, the members of the central committee are chosen by direct vote of the party in the several districts. In Minnesota the members of the Republican state committee are selected by the chairman of the state convention on the nomination or suggestion of the candidates for state office in the ensuing campaign. In Tennessee, eight of the eighteen members of the Democratic state committee are appointed by the nominee for the office of governor. In states where the committee is partly composed of members at large, these members are selected by the state convention or by the chairman of the convention. A unique method of choosing the state committee is that provided for in the Wisconsin primary law, which is to be submitted to popular vote in 1904. Having abolished the state convention, the law proposes that, after the primaries, the party nominees for state office together with the candidates for the legislature shall meet and choose the state committee.¹ In Mississippi, where a state-wide direct primary law has been adopted, the state convention still assembles every four years, and at that time selects the state central committee.

Vacancies and removals. — Vacancies in the committee are in general filled by the remaining members. In a considerable number of states, however, there are exceptions to this rule. In states where the unit of representation is the county, the power to fill the vacancy is not infrequently lodged in the local committee; so in the Democratic organizations of Louisiana and Maine, and in the Republican organizations of Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. In other cases the power to fill vacancies is vested in the executive committee of the state committee; and in some organizations the chairman of the state committee is empowered to fill the vacancy.²

The removal of members from the state committee seems not to be contemplated at all in some states. There is no provision

¹ These same persons, according to the provisions of this law, are also charged with the function of formulating the party platform.

² Democratic: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Nevada, South Dakota. Republican: Montana, Minnesota, Rhode Island.

for removal in the state constitution of the party and there is no record of any such case. The chairman of the Delaware Republican organization states, in reply to the question touching removal, that "ostracism" is the only method known to him; and from Iowa comes the answer: "making it so hot for him that he will resign." But in many states there is a well defined understanding as to the process by which a recalcitrant or disloyal member may be removed from the managing committee. In the Montana Democratic committee a unanimous vote is required for removal; in the Kansas Democratic committee and in the Mississippi Republican committee a two-thirds vote is necessary; in other states a mere majority is deemed sufficient. In the Republican organizations of Georgia and of Utah the county convention possesses the power of removal.

Officers and sub-committees. — The officers of a state committee are few in number. There is a chairman, a secretary, a treasurer, and sometimes, in addition to these, a vice-chairman and a sergeant-at-arms. These functionaries are generally elected by the committee itself; but they need not be, and frequently are not, members of the committee. In most of the organizations there are sub-committees, of which the most important is the executive or campaign committee. This is usually composed of from three to nine members and is the most active part of the state organization. Another important committee is that on finance, and in many state organizations there is a separate auditing committee. A speakers' bureau or literary bureau or both are frequently found. Of all the officers the chairman and the secretary of the whole committee are the most important. Indeed, the campaign in many cases is really placed in the hands of these two men.

Powers. — The powers of the state central committee are seldom clearly defined, either by the written or by the unwritten constitution of the party. It can scarcely be said to govern and guide the party in the formulation and execution of policies, for as a rule this is a matter altogether outside its jurisdiction. The informal steering or managing committee which really determines the policy of the party is likely to be another group of politicians, although the actual leaders of course control the state committee through their agents and are sometimes found there in person.

Y The important powers and duties of a state committee, as of a national committee, center in the conduct of the campaign. Given the candidates and the platform, it is the function of the state committee to see that these particular persons and principles are endorsed by the voters of the state, or at least that the full party strength is polled for them. The state committee determines the time and place of the nominating convention, fixes the ratio of representation, and issues the call for the convention. It often makes up the temporary roll of the convention, suggests temporary officers of the convention, and in general assists in putting the machinery of the nominating body in operation. After the convention is over, the committee takes charge of the conduct of the campaign and exercises general supervision over its progress. The committee raises the funds necessary for the prosecution of the work and distributes them at its discretion. It prepares and sends out appropriate literature to strategic points within the state, and assigns speakers to places where it is supposed they will be most effective. In short, the state committee is the managing board entrusted with the conduct of the state campaign, and as such is expected to practise all the arts known to politicians to bring about the success of the party. X

Y The adoption of the Australian ballot system has involved a legal recognition of the political party as sponsor for nominations to appear on the ballot under the party emblem or with the party name. The convention was declared the official representative of the party in the first instance, but it was found necessary to make further provision for vacancies caused by the death or disability of candidates for state office. The laws of most states accordingly authorize the state central committee of the party to fill vacancies occurring on the ticket.¹ In some of these laws this power is granted only in case there is not time to reconvene the convention; in others there is no such limitation. It is sometimes further provided that the substituted name must be that of a member of the party in question. X Thus the Missouri statute reads: "No central committee shall have power to substitute, to fill any vacancy, the name of any person, who is not known to be of the

X¹ Illinois Rev. Stat., sec. 296; Massachusetts Rev. Stat., ch. ii, sec. 152. X

same belief and party as the person for whom he is substituted.”¹

✓ In the conduct of a campaign the state committee coöperates with the national committee, and to some extent with the congressional committee. It must also be constantly in touch with the local organizations of the state. On the nature of the relation between the state and the local authorities, the printed rules of the state organizations present many interesting facts. In some instances the authority of the central committee over the local committees is very great. In Colorado, the Democratic state committee has full power, except during the session of the state convention, ✓

to consider, pass upon and determine all controversies concerning the regularity of the organization of the party within and for any congressional district or county or city in the state of Colorado and also concerning the right to the use of the party name.²

Procedure in the case of contests is elaborately regulated, and full power is conferred on the committee to carry out its decrees. In Pennsylvania the Democratic state committee is empowered to examine the rules of party organizations, and to refuse representation in the state convention or the use of the party name unless the rules are such as to meet with its approval. The committee is empowered to “direct such changes as may appear necessary and expedient,” and to refuse recognition of the local committee until such changes are made.³ The rules of the Indiana Republican organization declare that the central committee has

immediate and full control of the political affairs of the Republican party in the state, the management of its campaigns, the collection and disbursement of funds, the selection of speakers, the distribution of documents, and generally shall adopt such honorable and vigorous measures as may be necessary to insure the success of the Republican party and the election of its members.⁴

¹ Missouri Rev. Stat., sec. 7088.

² Rules, sec. 7.

³ Rules, ii, sec. 3. *Cf.* the Democratic rules in Virginia and Kentucky.

⁴ *Cf.* the Republican rules in Kentucky, art. 3, and in Missouri, sec. 4.

Where the authority conferred on the central committee is not so extensive as in Colorado and Pennsylvania, the central organization is expected to watch over the local agents of the party, and to stimulate and encourage their activity in every possible way. Especially in localities where factional strife endangers the success of the party, it is the function of the state committee to act as a board of conciliation and arbitration and, if possible, bring about at least a temporary truce between the combatants. As the Missouri Court said in the case of *State v. Leseur*:

It would seem inherently necessary in all party organizations that there should be some governing head, some controlling power, some common arbiter, which, if emergency should arise therefor, can lay its hands on the heads of the warring factions within the party and compel the observance of wholesome regulations, conducive alike to efficient party organization, order, fair dealing and good government.¹

In another Missouri case, however, the interference of the state committee in local affairs was overruled by the supreme court of that state. In Jackson County there was a bitter factional fight between two wings of the Democratic party, and two conventions were held. Each convention nominated a set of candidates and each held that its nominees were the regular candidates of the Democratic party and entitled to appear as such on the official ballot. The state committee, after considering the case, decided that the proceedings were irregular in character and ordered a new convention. The case was carried to the supreme court, where it was held that one of the two sets of candidates was regularly nominated, and that the state committee had no authority to declare the nominations invalid without granting a hearing to both factions. The court said:

Before a committee organized for the efficient management of party affairs of the state at large can set aside the action of a party acting under its own local government, it must first be shown that the local organization has either become disrupted and disorganized, or that the nominations for a particular election have been procured by fraud or in disregard of the usages and customs of the party; and it inevitably

¹ 15 S. W. Rep. 539 (1891).

follows that the nominees of the local organization whose nominations are to be set aside shall be accorded a hearing and a time and place fixed for that hearing of which they shall have had reasonable notice, and an opportunity to present their evidence.¹

X In conclusion it may be said that the plans of organization here outlined are by no means rigid and inflexible in their nature. They are convenient methods of directing campaign work, but they may be altered or radically changed by the action of the state convention. Thus in Illinois, in 1900, when the nominee of the Republican party for governor failed to secure a majority of the state central committee, a resolution was introduced in the convention increasing the number of the committee by the addition of eight members at large. This motion was declared carried by the chairman of the convention, who proceeded to name eight members in the interest of the gubernatorial candidate. In any party emergency, or in the course of a fierce factional fight, the rules governing the organization of the central committee are likely to be overridden by the stronger or more cunning. To infer, however, from such instances of intervention on the part of state conventions, that the organization of a state central committee is a matter of slight importance, and that it makes little difference in whose hands the control rests, would be quite erroneous. To the ambitious aspirant for party authority the state central committee is a point of great strategic importance, and many a bitter fight has been waged for its control. Y The possession of the central committee is, if not conclusive, at least presumptive evidence of party authority and control — one of the external marks of sovereignty.

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¹ *State v. Crittenden*, 64 S. W. Rep. 162, at 169. In the case of *Whipple v. Broad*, 55 Pacific Rep. 172, the Colorado court held that the removal of Broad, the chairman of the Silver Republican state central committee, by C. A. Towne, provisional chairman of the national committee, was unauthorized and could not affect the party standing of Broad.





